

## **Balancing Preservation and Forestry: Public Lands Policy in British Columbia**

Both Canada and the United States face difficult policy choices as they balance their timber and natural resource industries with environmental protection and the demands of indigenous peoples. The United States is in the process of a major reassessment of public lands policies, particularly in the western states. In Canada, public lands policy is much more a responsibility of the provinces. In the early-to-mid 1990s, British Columbia pursued an extremely ambitious effort to revise its public lands policy. It produced major new legislation, planning activities, and administrative actions that represent a remarkable attempt to involve the public in land-use and natural resource planning. The purpose of this research is to explore the British Columbia's recent forest policy initiatives, assess their likely impact on the province, and discuss the implications of the Canadian experience for the Pacific Northwest.

For several years, westerners in the U.S. have organized "sagebrush rebellions," "wise use" movements, political campaigns, and litigation strategies aimed at increasing local control over federal lands in their states. The election of Bill Clinton in 1992 and the selection of Bruce Babbitt as Secretary of Interior in 1993 led to a flurry of legislative and administrative proposals to change public lands policy. Promises to change grazing, mining, timber, water, and wilderness policy were met with tremendous opposition, and few changes were made during the first two years of the Clinton administration.

Species like the threatened northern spotted owl are also caught in the middle of the conflict over which jobs and industries will be advantaged as a result of public lands policy and the debate between loggers who want to clear cut remaining forests in order to keep the timber industry health for several more years and environmentalists who want to preserve the forests. The owl's primary habitat is in the national forests and Bureau of Land Management lands in California, Oregon, and Washington that contain Douglas firs. Because of low reproductive rates and low survival rates of young owls, it was listed as a threatened species by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in 1990. The owl is believed to be an indicator species, since it feeds at the top level of the forest, and other species in these old-growth forests may also be threatened. The Clinton administration held a summit meeting in Oregon in April 1993 to try and come up with a compromise plan. It recommended later that year the creation of a reserve system for many old-growth areas that would also protect watersheds and riparian areas, changes in tax policy to discourage the exporting of raw logs for processing in other countries, and financial assistance to logging communities. Neither the timber industry nor the conservation community was happy with the proposal: they did not agree on what level of timber cutting was sustainable; environmentalists pushed for a logging ban in old growth forests, while timber companies were permitting to make thinning and salvaging cuts; and allowing cuts around salmon streams would favor logging at the expense of fishing jobs.<sup>1</sup>

The Northwest Forest Plan became the centerpiece of the Clinton approach. The administration brought together biologists, hydrologists, economists, and other scientists in a